



BACK PAIN GUIDE



Back pain is extremely common. In fact, according to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS), spine injuries are the most prevalent musculoskeletal impairments, and 80% of Americans will suffer from a neck or back injury at some point in their life. Back pain is also the second most common reason for missed work in America.

Common Causes

While most back pain is due to inflammation, there are many other possible causes of back pain.

Muscle tension and strain are often times the cause of back pain. Using improper lifting methods or making a sudden awkward movement can lead to immediate, intense pain. This may also happen after months or even years of improper form and awkward movements, which can lead to a loss of strength in the back. Unlike other forms of back pain, pain from tension and strain usually remain localized to the injured area. It is sensitive to the touch and discomfort increases when participating in strenuous activity. Other forms of localized back pain may be due to a muscle spasm or pull.

Degenerative changes in the lumbar spine occur as a result of aging or illness. Osteoporosis and arthritis are two major degenerative changes affecting the back.

Osteoporosis is a condition in which the bones weaken, causing them to become porous and fragile. Most back pain resulting from osteoporosis is caused by the compression of the vertebrae and because of bone weakness, this can easily lead to fractures. Women are at a greater risk for osteoporosis, especially after menopause.

Arthritis is another common form of back pain due to aging. Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis affecting the back. Osteoarthritis is caused by the wearing down of cartilage and fluid in the joints, removing the cushioning

General Anatomy

The back is comprised of the bottom five vertebra (called the lumbar vertebra), the sacrum (which is part of the pelvis), as well as a network of muscles that effect the function of the mid-back, into the low back, and down into the pelvis. The nerves that leave the lumbar vertebra feed into the lower extremities.

between bones. Pain resulting from osteoarthritis is generally worse in the morning and evening and is accompanied by stiffness.

Injury to the nerves of the back most often causes sharp pain in one specific area, with numbness where the nerve ends. Nerve injury (neuropathic pain) is rarely associated with any swelling or damage to the muscles of the back. A herniated disk, also referred to as a slipped disk or ruptured disk, often results in an injury to the nerve. Another cause of nerve injury is a fracture of the vertebrae caused by trauma. Injury to the nerves of the back can result from almost any activity (general wear and tear, constantly sitting, improper lifting, or trauma).

Treatment

Minor back pain may be treated in a variety of ways:

Rest is an important part of back pain recovery, although too much rest can make back pain worse. It is important to allow your back to rest initially so that swelling may decrease, but by limiting all movement, the back will become stiff. Avoid heavy lifting and any other type of strenuous activity.

Ice/Heat is an important part of the recovery process. For most pain, it is best to apply ice for the first 2-3 days after injury, using heat compressions after that.

The Next Step

Back pain can be a debilitating injury for many people. Physical therapy can help to put you on the path to freedom from pain by helping you increase your strength, regain mobility, and return you to your pre-injury activity level.

You don't have to live with back pain. At **Idaho Physical Therapy**, our caring, professional, experienced therapists can help you achieve the fastest, most complete recovery possible. Call us today to book your free assessment - **(208) 463-0022!**

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Gentle stretching and strengthening exercises can be very beneficial for both working through pain and preventing future back pain. While basic stretching is advised, it is best if preformed under the guidance of a physical therapist.

Lifestyle adjustments can make a big difference in your back pain, as well. Adjusting or eliminating certain activities from your daily routine can make a big difference in how you feel. For example, if you do frequent heavy lifting, make sure you use proper form. Also, when sleeping, try lying on your side with legs bent and a pillow between your knees to allow your back to relax fully. Finally, refer to our "Posture in the Workplace" article in the Education Corner section of the Idaho Physical Therapy website for many helpful tips on how to avoid and correct back pain in the workplace.

Pain that worsens or is due to a more serious condition should be diagnosed and treated by a medical professional.

